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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the literacy services provided by public libraries in the rural areas (communities of 25,000 people or less) of West Virginia and Kentucky. Of the 93 libraries (68%) which responded to the survey, 89.8% acknowledge illiteracy as being a problem. However, although 92% of the librarians agree that illiteracy programs are an important library service, 62.2% of the libraries do not have a staff person assigned to coordinate these programs. The most common form of literacy service (89%) was found to be cooperative programs between public libraries and literacy organizations, followed by the provision of books and materials by libraries (87.9%) and volunteer tutoring (69.2%). The number of people taking advantage of the libraries' literacy programs is small; 39.5% of the libraries have only 1 to 10 people per year using the service, and only 10.5% of those responding provide service to over 50 people. Survey data is displayed in 18 tables. An appendix contains the cover letter to library directors and literacy survey questionnaire. (Contains 17 references.) (MAS)

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ADULT LITERACY SERVICES IN RURAL PUBLIC LIBRARIES

A Master's Research Paper submitted to the
Kent State University School of Library and Information Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Library Science

by

Mary Jane Backus

May, 1994

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ABSTRACT

Literacy is an important issue in the United States, with some 30,000,000 Americans having serious problems related to it. The library has played a role in dealing with literacy for the past century. Studies to find out what is being done have focused on libraries in urban areas. It has been found that public libraries provide more literacy education services than other types of libraries. These services include materials, instructions and support services. However, research with libraries in rural areas has been limited.

This study surveyed 137 public libraries serving communities of 25,000 or less in the rural areas of West Virginia and Kentucky to discover what types of literacy services are being provided. Ninety three (68%) of the libraries responded. Analysis of the data consists of descriptive statistics, namely frequencies and percentages pertaining to the community, the library and adult literacy services.

It was found that 89.8% of the libraries surveyed acknowledge illiteracy as being a problem, with the main reason for it being lack of education. While 92% of the librarians agree that literacy education is an important service of the library, over half of the libraries (62.2%) do not have a staff person to coordinate literacy services. Funding is not plentiful, either internal or external.

Most of the libraries (89%) provide literacy services through cooperation with literacy organizations. Books and printed materials are provided by 87.9% of the libraries and 69.2% provide volunteer tutoring.

The numbers of persons utilizing the services per year are not high; 39.5% of the libraries have from one to ten persons a year using the service. Only 10.5% have over 50 persons a year.

The fact that illiteracy is being addressed by these libraries and people are being helped is a hopeful sign and a foundation that can continue to be built upon in the future.

Master's Research Paper by

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B.S. in Ed., Youngstown State University, 1990

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Illiteracy in the United States is often a hidden entity, but its effects are far reaching. There are approximately 30,000,000 adults in the United States with serious literacy problems.[1] "An estimated $225 billion a year is the cost to the country in lost productivity, welfare, prisons, crime, and related social ills."[2]

The goals of literacy for every adult American by the year 2,000 was set by President Bush and the nations's governors in 1990.[3] To combat the problem, the National Literacy Act (PL 102-73) was signed in July 1991 allowing $1.1 billion for new literacy initiatives over the next four years.[4]

In early times, the ability to read and write was the exception rather than the rule. It was not until the mid 1800s that illiteracy was perceived as being a problem. This came about when universal free education was established with its ideal of literacy for every citizen.[5]

The involvement of the library in the literacy effort goes back to the late 19th century with the educational programs provided for immigrants at the New York Public Library. Library literacy programs continued to develop through this century, but became a focal point in the 1960s with the War on Poverty. Major development of programs took place in the 60s and 70s.[6]

The literature of the 80s and 90s shows that national interest in combatting illiteracy is increasing. Studies have been done during the past decade providing a good picture of literacy services being provided by libraries.

These services fall into three categories: materials, instruction, and support services.[7] Public libraries were found to be predominant in providing services. For instance, in a study by Smith in 1981, it was found that 53% of public libraries were involved with literacy, as compared to 44% of state institutional libraries, 35% of community college libraries, and 16% of public school libraries. A 1988 study by Zweizig, Robbins and Johnson showed that public libraries are the "primary provider of literacy services in frequency and in the range of activities offered."[8]

However, the studies have focused mainly on urban areas, and little information is provided on library literacy services in rural areas.[9] Some 65 million people live in rural America, and 80% of the public libraries are in non-metropolitan areas. Rural can also be characterized as the "have-not" culture of American society.[10] Thus a study of this neglected area is needed to help fill the gap in the literature and to help provide answers to the national problem of illiteracy. There is much information to uncover which would provide valuable insight to this area of the whole literacy picture.

Purpose of the Study

This study surveyed public libraries in the rural areas of West Virginia and Kentucky in an attempt to find out what types of literacy services are being offered in these areas. These states were chosen because they contain a part of the Appalachian region which is a disadvantaged area. West Virginia and Kentucky have among the highest illiteracy rates in the country.[11] The purpose was to discover the role that libraries are playing in dealing with illiteracy in these areas and possibly help to point the way toward solving this problem of much national concern.

Definitions of Terms

There is not a universally accepted definition of literacy and this lack of consensus presents a problem with the statistics themselves.[12] For the purpose of this study, the definition of literacy is derived from one given in the National Literacy Act of 1991. Literacy means "an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society."[13]

Rural libraries are those serving a population of 25,000 or lower located outside of a metropolitan area.

Adult is anyone eighteen years of age or older.

Literacy education means "instructional, informational or other activities directed toward increasing the reading, writing and computational skills of adults."[14]

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to a description of public libraries in the rural areas of West Virginia and Kentucky. Therefore, the findings are not necessarily generalizeable to all public libraries.

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There has been an abundance of literature dealing with literacy and libraries since the early 80s. Several studies have been done examining the involvement of libraries with literacy. These have focused mainly on libraries in urban settings.

One problem in literacy studies is with the definition of literacy itself. Since there are varying definitions, there is not a true consensus in the statistics and in what is being measured. In a 1979 survey, the Census Bureau counted persons over 14 who could not read or write English as illiterate.[15] A 1988 study by Zweizig, Robbins and Johnson defined the illiterate adult as one over 16 not enrolled in secondary school.[16] Today there is a broad meaning of literacy, as seen in a statement by the American Library Association:

> Any definition of literacy must include the following: the reading and comprehension of a variety of printed materials for work and leisure as well as the comprehension of a variety of materials through the electronic media, the ability to communicate in oral and written language, and the ability to use various technological hardware and the accompanying software. Given these dimensions, levels of literacy vary from person to person and from group to group.[17]

Literacy education also has varying meanings. Zweizig, Robbins and Johnson defined literacy education as learning opportunities which range from "initial acquisition of basic reading ability through the threshold of functional literacy in home, work and community." A second definition was provided through a list of literacy activities which fall under three categories: materials, instruction, and support services.[18]

Two studies have traced the historical development of library literacy programs. Birge's 1981 study "Serving Adult Learners" covered the development of literacy programs in public libraries from the 1920s to the 1970s. It placed "library literacy activities in the broader context of the library commitment to educational services."[19] The definition of the adult independent learner included "new readers." Types of learning activities provided by the library were categorized in five areas ranging from materials to instructions. Lyman expanded on the historical review of the library's role in literacy, covering the period from 1955 to 1978.[20]

Although libraries have been historically involved in the literacy movement, this involvement has varied according to the 1981 study "Libraries in Literacy." In a survey of 544 libraries and state library agencies, Smith found that only one fourth provided any literacy education services.[21] Being unaware of the need for services was attributed as a main reason for lack of involvement. The most common literacy activities provided were: materials for students and tutors; space facilities for classes or tutors; and information and referral. The highest rate of involvement was by public libraries in urban and suburban areas.[22]

While libraries are not all actively involved in providing literacy services, referral to other agencies is practiced by the majority of librarians, according to the Adult Services in the Eighties (ASE) survey. It was conducted by the ALA RASD Services to Adults Committee in 1986 and sent to all U.S. public libraries serving populations of 25,000 or more, with 63% responding. Forty-four major questions regarding adult services in public libraries were asked, including four literacy service questions.[23] It was found that 80.2% of these libraries are providing literacy education referral.[24]

The high rate of referral to other agencies shows that the library cannot solve the literacy problem alone. It needs to work with other groups. "Working with Other Organizations to Meet the Literacy Challenge," a chapter in Literacy and the Library by Jeffrey Salter, gives some guidelines and information on groups such as Laubach Literacy International and Literacy Volunteers of America, which train and coordinate volunteer tutors for adults. On the national level, the Coalition for Literacy pools the efforts of eleven member organizations committed to literacy.[25]

Libraries and Literacy Education: Comprehensive Survey Report described a major study done in 1988 by Zweizig, Robbins and Johnson. It was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and one of its purposes was "to assess the current status of libraries in literacy education."[26] Findings showed public libraries to be the primary provider of literacy services, while state institution libraries and community college/technical school libraries had more limited involvement. The public library had the widest range of literacy activities, including materials, instruction and support services. It was found that the attitude of the librarian has a significant effect on the level of literacy services.[27] Seven case studies of model literacy programs were conducted, which included the Mary H. Weir Public Library in Weirton, West Virginia. The strength of its adult literacy program was demonstrated in its provision of the full range of literacy programming services in serving 11,000+ persons with literacy needs.[28]

In 1990, Johnson, Robbins and Zweizig expanded on and reorganized the results of their 1988 study in Libraries: Partners in Adult Literacy. Since libraries of all sizes were involved in the study, it was discovered that size was not the determining factor in whether literacy services were provided.[29]

However, when examining literacy activity by population categories, libraries serving a population of 25,000 or less had the lowest percentage on all activities, while all other population groups were at comparable levels.[30] Since rural libraries fall in the low population category, a question is raised as to why this situation exists.

A profile of the adult illiterate was provided in an update on illiteracy by the U.S. Department of Education in 1982. The English Language Proficiency Survey was administered to 3,400 adults age 20 and over in a national sample. It was found that 41% of adult illiterates live in central cities, 56% are under the age of 50, and 37% speak a language other than English at home. Only eight percent live in rural areas.[31] which may be the reason studies have not focused on this segment of the population. However, according to a paper "Black Illiteracy in the Rural South," there is a higher rate of illiteracy in the rural south than in the northern United States.[32] One possible reason could be that rural poverty areas are not effective in competing for federal assistance and are not receiving needed education and literacy funding.[33]

Literacy in rural areas may be approached differently than in large urban centers. In a paper "Strategic Planning for Rural Libraries: A California Case," Grieshap and Fretz described how a small library system in California planned for the future. The general populace ranked a literacy program as one of the five most important additions to the library, second in importance only to more books and library hours. In rural areas, the library may be the only community organization available, and it functions as a "community center," thus making it a most important resource for literacy activity.[34]

While there is a great diversity of literacy programs in rural areas, libraries are second only to school districts as providers of literacy services.

This is a finding of a 1990 study - Literacy in Rural America: A Study of Current Needs and Practices. This survey of rural adult literacy programs in fifty states was conducted by the Rural Clearinghouse for Lifelong Education and Development. According to the report, rural libraries are used frequently "as tutoring sites for literacy programs offered by other educational providers."[35]

One national study of libraries which focused completely on a rural population was "Assessing the Information Needs of Rural America." It was conducted by Vavrek in 1990 under the auspices of the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship at Clarion University of Pennsylvania, with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. A questionnaire was given to a random sample of library patrons in fifty targeted rural libraries from each U.S. census region to determine if the library was meeting their information needs.[36] The importance of this study was that it was an initial attempt to study the role of the library in rural America, where the need for research is great.[37]

One other study uncovered was a statewide survey of literacy involvement in public libraries carried out by the State Library of Louisiana in December of 1991. Its purpose was to obtain data for the Directory of Louisiana Literacy Providers and to find out what obstacles exist towards literacy efforts. An important purpose of this study was to obtain suggestions on ways for the State Library to assist in the literacy effort. A list was generated through the survey and the State Library will continue in an improved advocacy role as a result of this survey.[38]

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Survey methodology was employed to investigate literacy education in rural public libraries in West Virginia and Kentucky. This was for fact gathering purposes, not for testing of hypotheses. A purposive sample of the whole population of rural libraries in those states was used.

A. Instrument

The research instrument was a 29 item questionnaire (Appendix A) which was used to measure the types of literacy education activities available in rural public libraries. The population studied were rural libraries serving communities of 25,000 or less in West Virginia and Kentucky, as identified in the American Library Directory.

Questions were directed toward obtaining demographic information about the library. Further questions were asked to discover the specific types of literacy services offered and if they are being utilized. A few questions related to the attitude of the library regarding literacy services are included.

B. Data Collection

The two-sided questionnaires were sent with a cover letter (Appendix B) and stamped return envelope to 137 rural public libraries in West Virginia and Kentucky. They were addressed to the library director; however, some were completed by another qualified staff member. Ninety-three responses were received. No follow-up was necessary.

Analysis of the data consists of descriptive statistics, namely frequencies and percentages.

CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The survey questionnaires were mailed in September 1992 to 137 directors of public libraries serving populations under 25,000 in West Virginia and Kentucky. Ninety-three responses were received, yielding a 68% return rate. Two responses were letters. The remaining 91 questionnaires (66%) were entered into the EDD data entry system of the SAS computer application program.

Respondents were asked to characterize the type of community served by their library. Out of 89 responses, 77.5% (69) identify the community as rural and 22.5% (20) as rural-suburban, thus confirming that the libraries surveyed are primarily rural (see Table 1). Two other written responses were "small town" and "small town/rural."

Although the questionnaires were sent to libraries serving populations under 25,000, more specific information was elicited. Forty-one (45.1%) of the responding libraries serve a population of less than 10,000 and 39 (43.8%) serve from 10,000 to 20,000. Only 11 (12.1%) serve between 20,000 and 25,000 (see Table 2). The majority of the libraries surveyed, 83.5% (76), have a collection size of between 10,000 and 50,000 volumes (see Table 3).

When questioned about sources of funding, it was found that 80.2% of the libraries (73), receive support through taxes. State or federal assistance is received by 74.7% (68). Slightly over half, 53.8% (49), receive contributions. Only 39.6% (36) receive funding through grants (see Table 4). Other written responses indicate endowment and Board of Education as sources of funding with 3% (3) each.

Table 1.

Public Library Directors Responding by Type of Community Served

Community N=89	f	%
Rural	69	77.5
Rural-suburban	20	22.5
Suburban	0	0
Total	89	100.0

Table 2.

Size of Population Served by Library

Size N=91	f	%
Less than 10,000	41	45.1
10,000-20,000	39	42.8
Over 20,000	11	12.1
Total	91	100.0

Table 3.

Size of Library Collection.

Collection N=91	f	%
Less than 10,000 volumes	6	6.6
10,000 - 50,000 volumes	76	83.5
50,000 - 100,000 volumes	8	8.8
Over 100,000 volumes	1	1.1
Total	91	100.0

Table 4.

Sources of Funding of Library

Funding N=91	f	%
Taxes	73	80.2
State/Federal Assistance	69	75.8
Grants	34	37.3
Contributions	50	54.9
Other	15	16.4

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In seeking information on literacy funding, the question was first asked as to what portion of the annual budget is allocated for programming. Out of 83 libraries, 49 (59%) allot from 5 to 10% (see Table 5). However, 62.8% (54) of 86 libraries earmark less than 5% of their programming budget for literacy education. Of the 28 libraries choosing the "other" category, 26 (30%) do not have a literacy allowance from the program budget (see Table 6). Only 25.5% (23 out of 90) libraries receive specific funding for literacy programs (see Table 7). Five (5.5%) of these commented that they receive grants for literacy programs. These figures indicate that the amount of money available for literacy services is low.

When asked if interested in receiving external funding for literacy programs, 65 responded. Of these, 67.7% (44) responded affirmatively (see Table 8). Those who are not interested, 32.3% (21), listed staffing, space problems, and existence of a literacy program in the community as some of the reasons.

The number of non-literate adults in the community was estimated by 88 libraries. There are a moderate number in 51.1% (45) of the communities; 34.1% (30) have many. Nine (10.2%) of the libraries indicated that there are few illiterate persons in the community (see Table 9). In written responses, 2 (2.2%) had no idea and 2 (2.2%) estimated around 30% of the county. One (1.1%) replied that "45% of adults are functionally illiterate" and another stated that "19.5% under 25 are without a high school diploma."

Demographic information shows that 93.4% (85) of the communities are comprised of a white population. African Americans are present in 37.3% (34) of the communities, Hispanic in 6.6% (6) and Native Americans in 4.3% (4) (see Table 10).

Table 5.

Percentage of Annual Budget Spent on Programming

Percentage of Budget N=83	f	%
1% to 5%	16	19.3
5% to 10%	49	59.0
11% to 15%	11	13.3
16% and over	1	1.2
Other	6	7.2
Total	83	100.0

Table 6.

Percentage of Program Budget Earmarked for Literacy Education.

Percentage of Budget N=86	f	%
Less than 5%	54	62.8
5-10%	4	4.7
Other	28	32.5
Total	86	100.0

Table 7.

Libraries that receive Funding for Literacy Education Programs

Funding Available N=90	f	%
Yes	23	25.6
No	67	74.4
Total	90	100.0

Table 8.

Libraries Interested in Receiving Funding for Literacy Programs

Interest in Receiving Funding N=65	f	%
Yes	44	67.7
No	21	32.3
Total	65	100.0

Table 9.

Estimated Amount of Non-Literate Persons in the Community

Estimated Amount of Non-Literate Persons N=88	f	%
Few	9	10.2
Moderate Number	45	51.1
Many	30	34.1
Other	4	4.6
Total	88	100.0

Table 10.

Population Groups Comprising the Community.

Groups N=91	f	%
White	85	93.4
African American	34	37.3
Hispanic	6	6.6
Native American	4	4.3
Other	3	3.3

The largest minority group is African American according to 80% (64) of the 80 libraries that responded to this question. Ten (12.5%) written comments stated that there is "no significant minority" (see Table 11).

The reasons for illiteracy in the community were elicited. Lack of education was given as the main reason by 90% (81) of 90 responding libraries. Learning disability accounts for 36.7% (33) (see Table 12). Several written remarks reveal that education is not considered important. One wrote "many can't see the value of education. Also, there is a sub-culture here that views education as something being forced on them by outsiders." Others point to poverty (1%) and the welfare cycle (1%) as contributing factors. Some individuals "get so far behind in the school system they either drop out or miraculously fake their way through," as one stated.

On the questionnaire, literacy services are divided into three types: materials, instruction and services. Respondents were asked to mark those services that are provided by their library.

In the materials group, 87.9% (80) of the libraries provide books and printed materials. The next most frequently provided type of material is videos, which are provided by 67% (61). Films, filmstrips and audiocassettes are used by 29.7% (27); 26.4% (24) make use of computer programs. Four (4.3%) written answers revealed that the library provides the materials and facilities, while a literacy council handles the service (see Table 13).

In the instruction category, volunteer tutoring to individuals is provided by 69.2% (63) of the libraries. Tutor training classes are held at 34.1% (31) libraries. Group presentations are given by 18.7% (17) of the libraries.

Table 11.

Largest Minority Group in the Population

Minority N=80	f	%
Black	64	80.00
Hispanic	3	3.75
Native American	3	3.75
Other	10	12.50
Total	80	100.00

Table 12.

Reasons for Illiteracy in the Community

Reasons N=90	f	%
Lack of Education	81	90.0
English is Second Language	3	3.3
Learning Disability	33	36.7
Other	9	10.0

Responses to what literacy services are provided by the library show that 89% (81) of the libraries cooperate with literacy organizations in providing services. Written comments show that this is done in various ways. In one (1%) library, "two staff members serve on the literacy council." In another (1%), "the head librarian serves as secretary of the literacy council." One (1%) library acts as a facilitator and stated "the library also receives the council's mail and serves as a go between for students and the literacy coordinator" (see Table 13).

Referral to community agencies is made by 61.5% of the libraries. One (1%) respondent reported: "The county literacy council and Adult Education Center are on the same grounds: so we make frequent referrals." Information/publicity is provided by 57.1% of the libraries (see Table 13). There appears to be a good cooperative effort between the libraries and literacy agencies.

Only 37.8% (34 of 90) have a staff person who coordinates literacy programs and services (see Table 14). Five (5.5%) written responses indicate that an outside person, ususally from the Literacy Council, does this.

The number of people utilizing the literacy services per year is from one to ten in 39.5% (34) of the libraries. A combined 50% (43) have anywhere from 11 to 50 persons using services (see Table 15). Only 10.5% (9) of the libraries have over 50 persons. One (1.1%) of these indicated that there are over 100 students.

On a Likert scale, a combined 80.7% (71) of the librarians agree or strongly agree that literacy education is an important service of the library. Another 11.4% (10) tend to agree. Two (2.2%) written responses expressed the fact that there is not enough staff to provide this service. Seven (7.9%) of

Table 13.

Literacy Services Provided by the Library

Literacy Services N=91	f	%
Materials		
Books and Printed Materials	80	87.9
Videos	61	67.0
Films, filmstrips, audiocassettes	27	29.7
Computer Programs	24	26.4
Other	11	12.0
Instruction		
Volunteer Tutoring (individual)	63	69.2
Tutor Training Classes	31	34.1
Group Presentations	17	18.7
Other	9	9.8
Services		
Cooperation with Literacy Organizations	81	89.0
Referral to Community Agencies	56	61.5
Information/Publicity	52	57.1
Other	4	4.3

Table 14.

Is there a staff person who coordinates literacy programs and services?

Staff N=90	f	%
Yes	34	37.8
No	56	62.2
Total	90	100.0

the librarians disagree that literacy education is an important service of the library (see Table 16).

A logical question is whether the persons who participated in literacy programs increased their use of the library. Of 87 responses, 11.5% (10) strongly agreed and 43.7% (38) agreed to this statement; 34.5% (30) were not sure. Eight (9.2%) disagreed. Only one (1.1%) strongly disagreed and stated "not one of the literacy students use the library. Our case may be unusual (hopefully it is!)" (see Table 17).

A chi square analysis of the relationship between the number of people utilizing the literacy service and the size of the community served by the library was performed. It indicated that a significant relationship exists between the variables (chi square = 24.096, p = .002) (see Table 18).

Open ended comments at the end of the questionnaire mostly pertained to cooperation with literacy organizations. In many cases, the library furnishes the space, materials and sometimes a staff member for literacy programs. This is evidenced in one of the remarks, which stated "literacy programming is coordinated through a local association. A library staff member is an active volunteer. In this community, the program is successfully coordinated through this outside agency."

In some cases, the school system handles literacy education. For example, one library stated "our local school system has an adult literacy program that is most successful. Therefore, we do not have a special program as such for these individuals. We do provide books and materials when needed, however, and certainly we make ourselves available for these services."

Table 15.

Number of Persons Utilizing Literacy Services Per Year.

Number Utilizing Services N=86	f	%
1 - 10	34	39.5
11 - 20	13	15.1
21 - 30	21	24.4
31 - 50	9	10.5
Over 50	9	10.5
Total	86	100.0

Table 16.

Librarians Who believe Literacy Education is an Important Service of the Library.

Extent of Agreement N=88	f	%
Strongly agree	38	43.2
Agree	33	37.5
Tend to agree	10	11.4
Disagree	7	7.9
Total	88	100.0

Table 17

Persons who participated in literacy programs increased their use of the library.

Extent of Agreement N=87	f	%
Strongly agree	10	11.5
Agree	38	43.7
Not sure	30	34.5
Disagree	8	9.2
Strongly disagree	1	1.1
Total	87	100.0

Table 18

Relationship between Number of People Utilizing Literacy Services (per year) by Size of Population Library Serves

	Size of Population							
Number of people Utilizing	Less than 10,000		10,000-20,000		Over 20,000		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1-10	20	23.26	11	12.79	3	3.49	34	39.5
11-20	9	10.47	4	4.65	0	0	13	15.1
21-30	5	5.80	14	16.28	2	2.33	21	24.4
31-50	1	1.16	6	6.98	2	2.33	9	10.5
Over 50	2	2.33	3	3.49	4	4.64	9	10.5
Total	37	43.02	38	44.19	11	12.79	86	100.0

Chi-square value = 24.096
p = .002
Df = 8
Sample size = 86

A few remarked on the lack of funds, and one noted, "the library did not receive a grant to continue the program started last year with a $22,000.00 Federal grant. We are continuing in the hopes more grant money will be available."

CHAPTER V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The data provided by this survey gives a good idea of how rural public libraries in West Virginia and Kentucky are providing adult literacy services. A picture evolved of the communities surveyed, showing them to be primarily comprised of a white population, with a low percentage of minorities. Illiteracy is acknowledged to be a problem by all but ten percent of the libraries, with the main reason given by 90% of the libraries being lack of education. According to written comments, an unfavorable attitude towards education exists in some places.

Ninety-two percent of the librarians agree to some extent that literacy education is an important service of the library. However, over half of the libraries (62%) do not have a staff person to coordinate literacy programs and services. While internal funding is not plentiful and outside funding is not always available, most libraries are nevertheless active in some way in making resources available to the community to aid with illiteracy. This is done mainly through cooperation with literacy organizations (89%), providing books and printed materials (87.9%) and volunteer tutoring (69.2%).

These figures compare favorably with those of a national survey of libraries by Zweizig, Robbins and Johnson in 1988. According to Libraries and Literacy Education: Comprehensive Survey Report, that study found that 88% of the public libraries surveyed refer literacy requests to the appropriate provider, 58% provide printed literacy materials, and 61.4% provide space for tutoring.[39]

Although most of the libraries surveyed are providing adult literacy services in some form, the number of persons utilizing the services is not particularly high; 54.6% of the libraries have 20 or fewer persons a year. Only

10.5% have over 50 people a year. This rate of usage might be attributed to the attitude that exists towards education. However, in an article entitled "Adult Literacy in Rural Areas" by Susan T. Ferrell and Aimee Howley, the authors acknowledge that "literacy programs - even those claimed to be effective - have had a limited influence on adult literacy rates in rural areas."[40] One reason is that competition for funding among several agencies can inhibit the effectiveness of programs. One way of making them work, emphasized by Kozol and Noor, is that "involving community members in the development, promotion, and evaluation of literacy programs gives rural residents a stake in making these programs work."[41]

The libraries surveyed in West Virginia and Kentucky are making a sincere effort in dealing with the problem of illiteracy. The fact that this problem is being addressed and people are being helped is a hopeful sign and a foundation that can continue to be built upon in the future.

Recommendations for Further Research

Since literacy research in rural public libraries has been limited, more fact gathering should be done with public libraries in other rural areas. A closer analysis could be taken of the individual libraries and the types of services they provide. How literacy services are publicized and what brings people to utilize them warrants study so that more persons could be drawn to using the services.

APPENDIX A

Cover Letter to Library Directors

School of Library and Information Science
(216) 672-2782
Fax 216-672-7965

Kent STATE UNIVERSITY
P. O. Box 5190, Kent, Ohio 44242-0001

LITERACY EDUCATION IN RURAL PUBLIC LIBRARIES

September 28, 1992

Dear Library Director:

I am a graduate student at Kent State University School of Library and Information Science. As partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Library Science degree, I am doing a research study on adult literacy. The purpose is to discover what literacy education services are available in rural or rural-suburban libraries, since no other studies have been done to determine this. The information obtained will provide valuable insight into the problem of illiteracy. Rural public libraries in West Virginia and Kentucky are being surveyed.

Enclosed is a questionnaire regarding the adult literacy education services provided by your library. These would include instruction, information, or any activities designed to assist adults in acquiring reading, writing or computational skills. For the purposes of this study, an adult is anyone 18 years of age or older.

Your participation in the study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, there will be no penalty of any kind. The questionnaire does not need to be signed and your identity will remain completely anonymous. There is no risk involved, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty of any kind.

This project has been approved by Kent State University. If you want more information, you may contact me at (216) 755-2907; or my research advisor, Dr. Lois Buttlar, at (216) 672-2782. If you have questions about Kent State University's rules for research, please call Dr. Eugene Wenninger at (216) 672-2070.

Another staff member in the library may complete the questionnaire, if qualified to do so. Please return it within three weeks. A stamped self-addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience. Results of the study will be available upon request.

Your assistance will be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time and interest.

Sincerely,

Mary Jane Backus

Mary Jane Backus
3527 La Salle Avenue
Youngstown, Ohio 44502

APPENDIX B

Survey Questionnaire

SURVEY OF LITERACY EDUCATION IN RURAL PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Instructions: Please check all that apply.

1. How would you characterize the community your library serves?

___ Rural
___ Rural-suburban
___ Suburban
___ Other _____

2. What is the size of the population your library serves?

___ Less than 10,000
___ 10,000 - 20,000
___ Over 20,000

3. What is the approximate size of the collection?

___ Less than 10,000 volumes
___ 10,000 - 50,000 volumes
___ 50,000 - 100,000 volumes
___ Over 100,000 volumes

4. What are the sources of funding?

___ Taxes
___ State/federal assistance
___ Grants
___ Contributions
___ Other _____

5. What percentage of the annual budget is spent on programming?

___ 5% to 10%
___ 10% to 15%
___ Other _____

6. What percentage of the programming budget is earmarked for literacy education?

___ Less than 5%
___ 5 - 10%
___ Other _____

7. Do you receive any specific funding for literacy education programs?

___ yes
___ no

8. If no, are you interested in receiving external funding for literacy programs if available?

___ yes
___ no

9. How many non-literate persons are there in the community? (estimate)

___ Few
___ Moderate number
___ Many
___ Other _____

10. Which of these population groups is the community comprised of?

___ White
___ Black
___ Hispanic
___ Native American
___ Other _____

11. Which population group constitutes the largest minority group?

___ Black
___ Hispanic
___ Native American
___ Other _____

12. What are the reasons for illiteracy in the community?

___ Lack of education
___ English is second language
___ Learning disability
___ Other _____

NOTES

[1]U.S. Congress, National Literacy Act of 1991 102d Cong., PL102-73 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1991), 1.

[2]Patricia Lora, "Libraries and Literacy in America 1985-2000," Public Libraries 29 (Nov.-Dec. 1990): 356.

[3]Howard Fields, "Education Report Finds U.S. Reading, Writing Skills Worsen," Publishers Weekly 238 (Nov. 8, 1991): 15.

[4]Howard Fields, "Action on the Literacy Act: Unusually Fast for Washington," Publishers Weekly 238 (Dec. 13,1991): 16.

[5]Marie Costa, Adult Literacy/Illiteracy in the United States (Santa Barbara, California: ABC:CLIO, Inc., 1981), xiii.

[6]Kathleen M. Heim and Donny P. Wallace, Adult Services (Chicago: American Library Association, 1990), 249-252.

[7]Douglas L. Zweizig, Jane Robbins, and Debra W. Johnson, Libraries and Literacy Education: Comprehensive Survey Report (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1988), Ch. 8, p. 1.

[8]Ibid., Ch. 1, p. 2.

[9]Ibid., Ch. 8, p. 1.

[10]Bernard Vavrek, Assessing the Information Needs of Rural Americans (Clarion, Pennsylvania: Clarion University of Pennsylvania, 1990), 8.

[11]Gwen Bailey, Peggy Daisey, and Sue C. Maes, Literacy in Rural America: A Study of Current Needs and Practices (Manhatten, Kansas: Rural Clearinghouse for Lifelong Education and Development, 1992), 7.

[12]Costa, Adult Literacy, 48.

[13]U.S. Congress, National Literacy Act, 1.

[14]Ester G. Smith, Libraries in Literacy Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1981), 5.

[15]Costa; Adult Illiteracy, 48-49.

[16]Zweizig, Libraries and Literacy Education, Ch. 2, p. 3.

[17]Helen Lyman, "Literacy Education as Library Community Service," Library Trends 28 (Fall 1979): 194.

[18]Zweizig, Libraries and Literacy Education, Executive Summary, 4.

[19]Ibid., 2.

[20]Ibid., 2.

[21]Smith, Libraries in Literacy, 134.

[22]Ibid., 154-155.

[23]Heim, Adult Services, 27-31.

[24]Ibid., 258.

[25]Jeffrey L. Salter and Charles A. Salter, Literacy and the Library (Englewood, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1991) 92-101.

[26]Zweizig, Libraries and Literacy Education, Executive Summary, 1.

[27]Ibid., Ch. 8, p. 102.

[28]Ibid., Ch. 7, p. 10-14.

[29]Debra W. Johnson, Jane B. Robbins, and Douglas L. Zweizig, Libraries: Partners in Adult Literacy (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1990), 111-112.

[30]Ibid., 31-32.

[31]Costa, Adult Literacy, 51.

[32]Evelyn Wesman, "Black Illiteracy in the Rural South," Rural Libraries 10 (1990): 49.

[33]Ibid., 55.

[34]James I. Grieshop and Phelan R. Fretz, "Strategic Planning for Rural Libraries: A California Case, Rural Libraries 10 (1990): 55.

[35]Bailey, Literacy in Rural America, 13-14.

[36]Vavrek, Assessing the Information Needs, 6.

[37]Ibid., 4-5.

[38]E. de Rijk Spanhoff and Gary O. Rolstad, "Literacy and Public Libraries in Louisiana: A Recent History and Survey," Mississippi Libraries 57 (Spring 1993): 13-16.

[39]Zweizig, Libraries and Literacy Education, Ch. 3, p. 3.

[40]Susan Ferrell and Aimee Howley, "Adult Literacy in Rural Areas," Journal of Reading 34 (Feb. 1991): 371.

[41]Ibid., 371.

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